

"A RISING TIDE LIFTS ALL BOATS,"

says DR. SIR RHODES BOYSON, M.P.

The Conservative Party conference was dominated by the controversy over Maastricht. As usual, Britain's old folk were not a high priority. Nevertheless, there are some Conservative MPs who voice their concern for the elderly. One of these, Dr. Sir Rhodes Boyson, has a long and honourable record of standing up for the old and the underprivileged. On the evening of Monday 6th October, just before he addressed a fringe meeting on the subject of "Euro-Nannyism", he spoke exclusively to **Pensioners' Voice**. Sir Rhodes was reluctant to comment on government policy, but although he was sympathetic to the plight of old folk, what little he did say does not bode well for the next four and a half years.

A pensioner now himself (he was born in 1925), Sir Rhodes was one of the MPs who signed Early Day Motion No. 179. This motion (as reported in *Pensioners' Voice*, May 1992) called for a substantial increase in the basic pension.

Asked why he had signed the motion, Sir Rhodes said that he believed that pensions should be pegged to average earnings, not the rate of inflation, quoting what he said was an old saying, "a rising tide lifts all boats".

However, he added that although pensions had unquestionably fallen behind, in the short term the country was in a mess, and that although the government would take steps to increase them their first priority was to improve the economy. Worse still, the government was overspending, and there would have to be cuts first. Did this mean that they would be cutting back on pensions and other things which affect the elderly? No, but things would most certainly get worse before they got better.

Somehow we got the impression that we had heard all this before; so did Sir Rhodes. He was clearly embarrassed by the Government's impotence, and refused to be drawn on SERPS, the plight of people with small occupational pensions and the "needs and means" controversy.

He stressed that although he is very concerned, he does not like to comment on things which he is not expert. Sir Rhodes, a former headmaster and graduate of Manchester University, is very knowledgeable on the development of the Social Security System over the past three hundred years and has written on it extensively.

The fringe meeting Sir Rhodes was addressing was held by FOREST, the smokers' rights organisation. The meeting though was concerned less with cigarette bans than with interference from Europe. Sir Rhodes is clearly out of step with the Conservative Party hierarchy over this matter too; he claimed there is a conspiracy by the leaders of the three parties to drag Britain into the Maastricht Treaty, and supported the call for a referendum, "The people don't want to go into Europe and as usual the people are right."

What will Maastricht mean for the country as a whole and for pensioners in particular? Sir Rhodes said it will worsen the standard of living because it's over bureaucratic, far too restrictive and will stop us competing effectively with the rest of the world; in effect, it will strangle Britain's already crippled industry with red tape. All in all, it's going to be a long, cold winter for everyone, especially the elderly, for the next four years.